

Fr. Nick VanDenBroeke
The Priesthood Series
Article 4 – The priesthood in the scriptures (Part 1)

There are many scripture passages which relate to the priesthood. This week I will focus on the words of Jesus.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, *“I tell you, you are Peter, an on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 16:18-20).

John chapter 17 is called the “High priestly prayer of Jesus” as he prays for his apostles during the Last Supper. During this prayer Jesus said, *“I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world....Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth”* (John 17:9,17-19). The beginning of this quote shows that Jesus was very intentional in praying specifically for his apostles. He then declares that they are consecrated before the Father just as he is.

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:21-23). Again, Jesus is present just with his apostles, and he gives them his own power to forgive sins in his name. And not only that, he says that they are sent out by him just as he has been sent out by his Father. In other words, they are to go out to the world and teach and act *In Persona Christi*—in the person of Christ.

“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19). Notice Jesus says *“Do this”*; he didn’t say *“Go write down my words”*. Thankfully the apostles did write down Jesus’ words, but even before they wrote anything, they began *“doing this in remembrance of Jesus”*, in other words, they began celebrating the Mass and consecrating the Body and Blood of Jesus as he commanded them to.

“Now the eleven disciples when to Galilee....And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus claims universal and absolute power. And again, Jesus is present only with his (now 11) apostles. In this statement Jesus is not simply designating his apostles as his minions who just talk about him, but they have his own authority. This is why Jesus begins by declaring his authority—*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”*—and then immediately adds—*“Go therefore! And make disciples...”*—they are sent out to act in the name and with the power of Jesus himself. Just as Jesus had previously given Peter the

power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth (Matt 16:19), so now Jesus gives this power over heaven and earth to all 11 apostles.

Additionally, this passage shows the very practical necessity for there to be leaders in the Church that Jesus has established, not just in the first century, but until "*the end of the age*". For, without leaders, how could the Church continue? How could the words of Jesus, the faith, authentically and completely be taught? Without leaders who have the authority to speak and act in the name of Jesus we would be on our own to try to read the scriptures and try to interpret them for ourselves (which is why we now have more than 30,000 different Protestant denominations...because each of these is another group or individual claiming that *they* properly interpret the scriptures.) Thankfully, because Jesus gave his authority to his apostles and their successors, the Catholic Church has *always* authentically taught the fullness of the Truth of Jesus, "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*".